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### Literature Healing

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Literature Healing

by

Courtney Robinson

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education of

The College at Brockport, State University of New York,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Chapter one: Introduction.....	4
Problem Statement.....	4
Significance of the Problem.....	5
Purpose.....	7
Rationale.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Summary Statement.....	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	10
History of YAL.....	10
Mental Health.....	12
Benefits.....	16
Who Can Benefit.....	18
Limitations.....	23
Chapter Three: Resources for Using YAL as a Tool.....	25
Section One.....	26
Section Two.....	47
Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	52
References.....	54

**Abstract:**

Using young adult literature (YAL) as a tool to bring awareness to mental health can provide a solution for the concerning rise of mental health issues being experienced by adolescents. It is evident that students need guidance and conversations about dealing with struggles they face such as depression, suicide, sexuality, and bullying. In order to use YAL as an effective tool, educators need access to texts that include characters experiencing mental health and psychological issues. Along with training, educators need to know how to convey and connect the information within the texts due to the density of the topics being covered. Educators may also benefit from having a resource guide filled with texts, films, and poems to use as a means to address mental health and create awareness within the classroom and the school.

## Chapter One: Introduction

**Problem Statement: There is evidence for using Young Adult Literature as a tool to address and bring awareness to mental health, creating the need for English Language Arts teachers to use texts with characters dealing with mental health issues.**

“I’m going to tell you a story about some friends I know. And all the fun we had one day ‘til it was time to go. Oh no!” (Fisher-Price Laugh and Learn). Stories have the ability to transport its readers to a different world from their own, and yet it has the potential to connect one’s experiences to that of the characters in the stories. Much like the parts of an individual, the characters, plot, setting, conflict(s), and theme all are essential to any story. Examined individually, these elements affect the outcome; however, they interact with one another to impact the story. In many cases, the students look up to the characters as role models and think ‘I can do that, I can succeed like this character’. Although this is an ideal outcome, students may not be equipped or encouraged to let novels assist them in expressing their emotions and struggles on their own. This is where educators come in.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2016) finds “mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life’s challenges. Left unmet, mental health problems are linked to costly negative outcomes such as academic and behavioral problems, dropping out, and delinquency” (NASP, 2016). Mental health leaves one to assume they are the only ones coping with the situation(s) at hand when this is not the case. To make these connections where feelings and experiences are validated, and fostering a sense of community that provides support, one

should learn how to make these connections in a multitude of ways. One such way is reading a book.

How can we marry the students and the experience of connection and acquiring skills with the YAL books? When educators choose books with characters with mental health issues, this allows the students to connect and comprehend what the characters are going through. Educators help bridge this marriage together. The lessons and the discussions that go along with the texts are also tools to help this unity. Having an open line to have conversations about the topics in the books and the students' lives can supply that support young people need. What makes an educator one to turn to? Someone who is trustworthy, honest, dependable, and willing to guide the students towards a healthy mental status. Once students recognize an educator or a school counselor is there for them for the right reasons, they will open, and a relationship is formed. Starting from the bottom to build this relationship is the most important. Scaffolding the skills and tools will greatly help students reach a healthy status. Reading literature is a safe learning experience to open the door to another world, that could be like the real one. School is a controlled environment where conversations can be had without fear and resulting in skills, positivity, and change.

### **Significance of the problem**

Students need to know the proper coping mechanisms when it comes to mental health. In order to better their mental health status, students should know how to recognize their issues and confront them or ask for help dealing with their stressors. Teachers using literature is a mechanism needed to explore mental health, but educators do not have the right resources, books, to use for this purpose. Using books that include characters with mental health issues can help break the stigma that mental illnesses exhibit. Many times, mental health becomes a huge

part of life at an early age. “Some illnesses are first diagnosed in childhood but many more begin to appear during the late teenage years and into early adulthood” (Canwetalk, 2016). As an educator, creating a space where students feel safe to talk about their mental health is crucial because talking about problems will create solutions. Educators need to provide students with skills and strategies to cope with and manage their mental health. Using YAL as a method to create and channel those skills will leave the students implementing them in their regular everyday lives.

Research has taken a look at how teachers choose to use or not to use YAL in their classrooms. “Although young adults read literature written for adults, we define YAL as literature written specifically for adolescents in grades 6-12” (Hazlett, Johnson, & Hayn, 2009). “The question of how often YAL is taught in middle and high school classrooms and methods used for its teaching arose” (Smith, Hazlett, & Lennon, 2012). This specific source continues with their survey and more evidence of the use or nonuse of YAL in ELA classrooms. Research conducted has found that teachers are not using YAL as much as they should. Today, schools are seen as being focused on assessments and state testing rather than connections and literature. Many teachers find themselves not having enough time in their lesson plans to fit in YAL. “Teachers critiqued the time needed for state standards and standardized test preparation. Depending on the state, curricula are limited to specific topics and texts that all teachers must include” (Smith, Hazlett, & Lennon, 2012). Teachers are wanting to teach YAL. They know the skills are important, of course, but ELA can use YAL when teaching the same skills.

Addressing such issues can be difficult and uncomfortable but providing the necessary tools and possible training can help the process. If educators know how to address hard topics,

then they can teach their students how to address those topics as well. Young adults need guidance and need to know there are people who are willing to help with their struggles, not ignore them. Throughout this paper, there will be evidence to support the use of YAL as a tool to bring awareness to mental health and resources for all involved, educators, parents, and the students.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to bring awareness of the importance of YAL and mental health. Teachers should have the resources to teach YAL in order to make permanent connections between students and the texts being used. I will be reviewing research that examines the benefits of using YAL as a tool to address mental health. By reflecting on the advantages and the few limitations that come with using YAL as a tool, I hope to make a case for the importance of using texts that include characters dealing with mental health issues. Although reading about characters dealing with these issues is not meant to solve all students' problems, it is meant to create awareness of psychological trauma and making connections between the pages and their own lives.

### **Rationale**

There are many great reasons to use YAL in today's classrooms and this project will focus on one of the more promising applications. Students experience a multitude of things. Some situations can include parents separating, being bullied, suicidal thoughts or actions, having low self-esteem, or depression. Reading books that include characters dealing with these tough, yet crucial, topics can open the doors for discussion and awareness. These topics can create a mirror in which students can see themselves and see the world around



them. Providing a more diverse selection of literature in the classroom will guide students down a path of self-awareness and conflict resolution.

Diversity in YAL can let students encounter feelings, challenges, and relationships they recognize in their own lives. However, there are critical issues in YAL novels. For example, *Thirteen Reasons Why* written by Jay Asher deals with bullying and suicide. Students are being bullied every day and this novel will encourage those discussions to prevent bullying and bring awareness to this issue. One middle school teacher said, “I refrain from using some adolescent literature due to censorship concerns... This response spread could also suggest that teachers participate in a process of self-censorship to avoid possible repercussions from administrators or parents” (Smith, Hazlett, & Lennon, 2012). Bringing up and having conversations about topics such as racism and rape can make dealing with them easier for everyone. There are a lot of stories relating to the students, but they are not being used in the classroom, resulting in students not making meaningful connections. My goal is to support the use of YAL in classrooms and bring awareness of psychological issues to create a perspective the students may never have seen before.

**Definition of terms:**

Bullying- seek to harm, intimidate, or coerce (someone perceived as vulnerable)

Connection- a relationship in which a person, thing, or idea is linked or associated with something else.

ELA- English Language Arts

Mental Health- mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life's challenges.

YAL- young adult literature

### **Summary Statement**

Educators need access to a diverse selection of YAL dealing with mental health issues that can stimulate crucial discussions about real-life experiences. Students who suffer from mental health problems benefit from reading YAL because they are able to make personal connections, have discussions, and seek help in ways that seldom occur in the more traditional literature-based curriculums. When students read YAL and learn about characters like themselves, they learn coping skills that they can use in their daily routines.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

### History of YAL:

Young Adult Literature (YAL) has been a controversial genre for decades. So much so it has been difficult to decipher who the genre generally is for. The genre can essentially go into any other genre; the difference is- YAL focuses on challenging issues that most young adults face such as intimacy, drugs, bullying, and death. According to CNN's *Brief History of Young Adult Literature*, teens going wild over and then tiring of books marketed directly to them has been a wave-like theme throughout YAL's evolution. Although things have drastically changed over the years, the genre has had quite a journey deemed worthy of acknowledgment.

YAL can first be seen during Medieval Times where moral code literature was used as a guide that older adults wanted young adults and teenagers to live by. Fast forward to 1477, the first book to be specifically read by young adults was called *A Book of Courtesy*. Then, jump ahead to the 19th century, the century known as "the first age of great children's books" introduced the world to such classics- *Alice's' Adventures in Wonderland*, *Little Women*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *Treasure Island*, and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Salisbury University, 2019). But of course, it wasn't just young adults reading such classics. In the 1920s, librarians first started to make note of the struggle citing how much of a challenge it was to provide books deemed appropriate for the particular age group. Mary Kingsbury (1971), a pioneer in defining the role of a school librarian, complained that librarians fled when "faced by adolescent demands for relevant books and the possibility of parental or administrative censure if they provide them..." (p. 325)

Then, in the 1930s, a group known as the American Library Association (ALA) created the young people's reading roundtable, along with an annual list suggesting children's and adult novels. "This is the first time that literature is marketed directly to teens," says David Levithan (Chisholm, 2015). It would take ten more years when the first book geared towards this genre was introduced- *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly. During the 1950s, psychologists Robert James Havighurst and Erik Erikson each wrote a book defining adolescence as a developmental stage when identity independence takes hold. The ALA followed suit, creating a Young Adult Services Division in libraries. The term "young adult" would not come into general use until 1958, coined by the Young Adult Library Services Association (Chisholm, 2015). This allowed the division to hone in and represent the 12-18 age range they hoped to engage, and for a while, these teen-targeted books were hot sellers. It was then in 1967 one book sparked the first golden age of YAL and inspired authors to write novels that were more than just "... 'a horse and the girl who loved it' storylines"- S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (Chisholm, 2015).

During the 1970s, the world of reading saw more authors writing about everyday issues such as *Judy Blume, Are You There God? It's Me, Margeret* (a story dealing with a girl's first period), *Forever* (a novel that deals with the struggle of "going all the way"), and *The Chocolate War* (a story that explores the issue of bullying). In 1980, the first major young adult franchise is created with Francine Pascal's *Sweet Valley High* (Purnama et al., 2019). Almost 20 years later, the second era of the golden age of young adult ignites with the release of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, later renamed as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1998). A year later, countless of fans camped outside bookstores for up to nine hours to get their hands on the next book in the series, thus exploding the fantasy genre within the YAL world. Today, the second golden age shows no signs of slowing down and disappearing, with

franchises such as *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, and *Divergent* fueling the billion-dollar industry. A 2012 Bowker Market research study further provided support in the strength of the genre by finding that in the US, 55% of people purchasing YA books are over 18 (Purnama et al., 2019).

Reading has become more than ever an emotional, cultural and social activities. YA readers are at the source of this- discussing books, connecting with other fans, and using social media to connect with their favorite authors to ask about plot holes, create drawings, songs, poems, and even declare their love for a character (i.e. Team Edward or Team Jacob). This level of engagement and connection has not been seen in readers of other genres, hence its increasing impact on the success of a book. Jennifer Lynn Barnes (2015) believes that teens, in particular, are drawn to paranormal or dystopian novels because of the connections they draw to their inner turmoil. She concludes that “Just like adolescence is between childhood and adulthood, paranormal, or other, is between human and supernatural,” said Barnes. “Teens are caught between two worlds, childhood, and adulthood, and in YA, they can navigate those two worlds and sometimes dualities of other worlds” (Barnes, 2015).

### **Mental Health:**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in five children and adolescents experience a mental health problem during their school years. Problems could include stress, anxiety, bullying, family problems, depression, a learning disability, and alcohol and substance abuse. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) shares on their website that “up to 60% of students do not receive the treatment they need due to stigma and lack of access to services” (NASO, 2016). Schools are an ideal place to provide mental health services to children and youth. Learning the proper coping mechanisms is an essential

component in mental health awareness. Students need to know how to recognize their issues and confront them or ask for help dealing with their stressors. Educators using literature is a mechanism needed to explore mental health, but many educators do not have the right resources, books, to use for this purpose.

An example of a mental health intervention is “bibliotherapy” or “reading therapy”. Rob Whitley (2019), the Principal Investigator of the Social Psychiatry Research and Interest Group, defines bibliotherapy referring to “structured book-reading programs run by clinics, libraries, or schools aimed at promoting recovery in people with mental health difficulties” (Whitley, 2019). According to a classic study, there was a decrease in depressive symptoms after a program of bibliography (C. Jamison & F. Scogin, 1995). Students want to read interesting texts, maybe ones they choose on their own. With that said, schools need to have an ample selection of books.

Studies have shown that fiction is a genre where students can learn basic skills like empathy, interpersonal understanding, and social skills. Leading expert Dr. Keith Oatly of the University of Toronto (2016) states that “fiction can augment and help us understand our social experience.” Reading fiction and analyzing the text can help students explore the inner lives of the characters. readers are able to form their own ideas about the characters’ emotions, motives, and ideas, off the page. With forming these ideas, students have the capability to connect their own lives to the text. Two examples Whitley provides are *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Path. Both of these stories create a deep understanding of alienation, loneliness, shaming, stigma and social exclusion. These issues are often experienced by people with mental health difficulties.

Many YA texts surround the topic of coming of age. Novels like *Harry Potter* and *Catcher in the Rye* deal with young teens trying to figure out the world around them while preserving their innocence. The coming-of-age genre dates back to the 17th century Germany when Johann Wolfgang Goethe and his contemporaries began writing about young protagonists, progressing on a journey toward maturity. Virginia Zimmerman (2017), professor of English literature at Bucknell University, explains “to come of age is perhaps the most common ground there could be among readers” (p.2). Middle and high school students are stuck in a place between carefree childhood and responsibility-laden adulthood. During this time, young adults are developing in multiple aspects, physically and mentally. Jen Petro-Joy (2018) reviewed the importance of coming-of-age stories, saying “...They’re starting to question their beliefs and their place in the world. They’re developing and redefining their personalities and pushing back against their parents. They’re figuring out where they stand in their peer groups” (Joy, 2018). Young adults are not equipped with the tools to handle adult-like situations, and it is up to the parents and educators to guide them and be there for them during this process of their lives. Mental health is an important component to function in everyday events. If mental health is off or not working correctly, then it can take a toll on the body physically.

Kia Jane Richmond believes bringing YAL into the classroom will help address a growing mental health challenge. “Students in our middle schools, high schools, and colleges who are living with depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses are at risk of being bullied, and not just in the hallways or on the bus but in our English Language Arts classrooms. Therefore, one of the issues that should be at the forefront of English Education is how literature can help young adults better understand—and confront the stigma of—mental illness, especially in an ever-increasing atmosphere of bullying” (Richmond, p.19). Bullying is a huge issue within the

walls of a school. Many students feel the need to attack other students, whether it is physically or verbally. Students do not know how to control their emotions, or their thoughts and they need a place where they can confront these issues without judgment. For students to address their issues, they may need to see similar issues in a different person. Someone who is on the same wavelength as them. When they go see a counselor, or speak with a teacher, they may feel threatened and looked down upon, even though it is not the intention of the counselor. The student does not understand people are there to help not scrutinize. “A majority of these teens are in our high school and college classrooms; thus, to foster empathy, English teachers at all levels ought to include texts that address mental illness or that feature characters with psychological difficulties in their curricula. They should also discuss methods to encourage empathy for those characters and for those in our communities” (Richmond, p. 20). The teens are the ones who struggle with mental health; not know where to get help or what to do. Humans are all products of their environment, meaning they act in response to seeing how others act. Many times, students jump on the bandwagon when it comes to bullying. They know it is wrong, but they do it anyway regardless of the consequences. Reading books that include characters who are getting bullied is all fine and good, but it is the discussion that follows the content that truly matters and will make the difference that is needed.

Students often feel alone even when they are surrounded by people. “That’s why books are so important. In books, readers can find people just like them. They can see how others navigated struggles and solved problems. They can brainstorm what might work for them and what might be a bad idea altogether. They can see that growing up may be hard—that it may seem almost intolerable at times—but that they *can* get through it. It might be messy, and the



process might not be wrapped up in a pretty bow with a perfectly crafted ending—but growing up without falling apart is possible. That they can do it, too” (Joy, 2018).

**Benefits:**

Educators are trained to notice signs of bullying, but sometimes the situations can be unrecognizable. When a student is being bullied, it is likely they are too afraid to go to a trusted adult and ask for help. Many educators are scared to address this topic of bullying, but they need to be aware that this is going on and it is affecting their students and the school climate. Swearer and Cary (2003) concluded that 80% of students in middle school believed their teachers were unaware of the bullying going on in the school. As educators, teachers need to know that rumor spreading, and isolation is just as dangerous and harmful as physical abuse. Within the pages of a book, students can witness how words and actions can shape a character’s mindset and the world around them. An article titled “Recognize the Signs: Reading Young Adult Literature to Address Bullying” written by Pytash, Morgan, and Batchelor dive into YAL and bullying and some possible resources for teachers. “Readers see firsthand how a comment can cut, an action can damage, or a rumor can destroy” (Pytash, Morgan, and Batchlor, p. 15). For students to understand this, educators need to know how to address this issue in the classroom. Using novels like *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, may guide this discussion. In this story, the main character, Hannah Baker, commits suicide mainly due to bullying. She then creates thirteen cassette tapes with each reason why she killed herself. This novel has become a popular show on Netflix, which many students may have seen. But reading and creating an illustration in the mind makes the story much more interesting.

As educators and students read these books covering these tough topics, empathy is starting to take form. Discussion is key when reading. How are students going to understand

these topics? How are they going to know it is okay to ask questions? Through discussion, "...teachers became empathetic to characters living through bullying, even when initially the incident did not seem like bullying. The character's response to or feelings about the event helped the preservice teachers realize that the event was indeed an act of bullying" (Pytash, Morgan, and Batchlor, p. 17). Reading through a character's eyes will help students relate and make connections to their own lives. Educators need to understand the weight of this specific topic. Many students may be at their breaking point, and educators do not want them to go over the edge because of what was said in class. Opening the floor to all questions concerning bullying is necessary. Reading this literature will open barriers for educators and students.

Perspective is everything. To empathize with someone, one needs to put themselves in their shoes and start walking. Adolescents are just learning that skill. During this stage of life, they are all about their feelings and the way they look and focused on themselves, no one else's feelings matter. What happens when the student reads a book and the character is going through something the student could not even imagine going through, like walking across a desert to get water, fighting for their life in order to save their family, or heading to Hogwarts to learn how to be a wizard. The intention of young adult literature is to open this skill and create awareness of other people's feelings, emotions, and well-being. Jurana Aziz, Phillip Wilder, and Raul Mora concluded the following:

"While teaching and learning with YAL may not solve all of these learners' problems, the intentional use of YA texts can create awareness of oppression and psychological trauma, while fostering equanimity among students. From this perspective, we find it useful for teachers to include YAL that addresses these psychological issues in their language and literature classes" (Aziz, Wilder, Mora, p. 72).

This group of authors analyzes the international effect YAL has on mental health and healing. For example, this article discusses the effect of YAL in Africa, specifically Tanzania. “YAL has recently embraced issues of self-worth in the face of persistent oppression and the cruelty of others. According to an analysis of literature written for youth (Koss & Teale, 2009), 25% of reviewed books focused on depression and/or mental illness issues. However, finding readily available YAL written by Tanzanian authors for Tanzanian youth- especially novels that speak to the lived experiences of youth described above- remains a significant challenge” (Aziz, Wilder, Mora, p. 73). Many people are so focused on what their own country is learning and feeling, but they do not think outside the walls of their country or their school. Reading YAL can create a level of consciousness for both students and educators. Many students are in their own minds where the atmosphere is oppression and low self-esteem. “As literacy and language teachers, we can use YAL and our own conscious stance to support greater student consciousness of oppression and to remind students that they need not look to others or other things to establish their worth” (Aziz, Wilder, Mora, p. 73). Analyzing YAL can create a mirror in which students can see themselves in the characters and see the world around them as well.

### **Who Can Benefit?**

The LGBTQ community is growing, and young teens are trying to find new ways to fit in while finding themselves. A lot of young adults struggle with being comfortable with themselves and coming to a point in their lives where being accepted is all they want. Young adult literature is an example of the support young teens need (Hazlett, L.A., Sweeny, W.J., & Reins, K.J. p.209). This genre is growing and will always be a place where students can feel safe by expressing their feelings and connecting with the characters inside the pages.

For many LGBTQ students, contemporary YAL novels might be a welcome relief; school does not feel like a safe place. The LAMBDA organization (2009) found that,

- 97% of LGBTQs regularly heard homophobic remarks, with 53% by school staff; 80% of preservice educators reported negativity toward LGBTQ youth.
- 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians cited verbal harassment or physical violence, with educators failing to intervene in 97% of such incidents.
- 89% of LGBTQ teens felt severe social isolation. 26% of gay males were forced to leave home because of sexual orientation; 42% of homeless youth are LGBTQ.
- LGBTQ adolescents accounted for 30% of teen suicides.

Using YAL can address these tough topics in a way that creates discussion, questions, and understanding. Making connections with characters is key. Students should feel like they can step into the story themselves and concentrate on how the character deals with the conflict. As an educator, choosing the right books for the classroom is key as well. No one wants to offend anyone or make things inappropriate. Choosing titles that help and that are informational will create a healthy space inside the classroom as well as a healthy headspace for everyone.

Asking questions is a crucial part of learning in general. For example, “Ask, ‘Where /how do you fit into the story?’ If students can vicariously identify with werewolves or historical characters, such a question helps them empathize with LGBTQ’s anxiety over leaving high school or a disabled character’s ill pet” (Hazlett, L.A., Sweeny, W.J., & Reins, K.J. p.209). Many people may think to teach this vicarious thinking is being taught in one unit; focusing on LGBTQ or just disabilities in three weeks out of the curriculum. This should be spread out over the course of the year. “As students read these titles in tandem with others, their

topics will become familiar and associated stigmas may begin to fade” (Hazlett, L.A., Sweeny, W.J., & Reins, K.J. p.209). During this period in the students’ lives, middle school and high school can be filled with harsh assumptions about the LGBTQ community as well as the disabled community. There are a lot of times where peers and some adults will look down on these people as if they are different and out of place. Having current resources on this topic, just as any topic, will be most useful in the classroom. Content should be available to all educators and students for them to learn more. When one learns and gains knowledge, one may become less judgmental. “Although LGBTQ titles are increasing, a paucity feature physical and intellectual exceptionalities, with this group’s romantic relationships excluded. Educators can extend the discussion to include missing situations only so much; supporting text is required. However, if we desire more novels, then we must either read and request more—or write such novels ourselves” (Hazlett, L.A., Sweeny, W.J., & Reins, K.J. p.212). The authors leave their readers with a final thought. Integrating young adult literature fully into the classroom with assist adolescents with their perceptions, deepen their awareness, and this will build the inclusion that is needed in the classroom every single day. Doing all these tasks, from a single YAL book, will build these students into productive and well-rounded adults.

LGBTQ YA novels have been written since 1969. Gallup (2002) found, “Best works portray LGBTQ adolescents in various situations and genres, interacting with an array of people, having heterosexual friends, and experiencing their sexuality as simply one facet of who they are. An example of echoing the high acceptance of LGBTQ people among those aged 18-29 is Levithan’s (2004) *The Realm of Possibility*. This novel follows Daniel’s journey by coming out to his family and his peers. Hazlett, Sweeney, and Reins divide their findings with LGBTQ

YAL into sections. Friendships/relationships, abusive relationships, devout LGBTQs, humorous titles, troubled LGBTQs, and futuristic. All these topics include titles and a brief summary.

Many young adult literature books, in general, have a female protagonist, who assumes the role of the main character. What does this mean for the boys though? For everyone in the class to feel a connection to the characters, it seems fair to have similar genders for the students to read about. If a female character is going through “typical” high school experiences like rumors and gossip, how can a boy relate to that the same way a girl can and vice versa? The point of any young adult literature is to have the ability and the opportunity to connect to the character and the experiences. Lo discovers that there are only about 4% of LGBTQ YA books that are about transgender or genderqueer characters. “The only light at the end of the tunnel about this statistic is that since 2007, every year has seen the publication of at least one trans/genderqueer title, and in 2011 we have three (including one book that includes both trans and lesbian characters)” (Lo, 2011). There is a compiled list of LGBTQ YA texts for the educators of the world. This topic is ever-growing and as the world changes, the literature in the classroom should too.

Inclusion in all classrooms is essential. Differentiation and proper representation are also important in schools around the world. Many students need to make connections to understand the content within the pages of a text. Emily Wopperer shares her research on why we need characters with disabilities in young adult literature. The following is a piece from her article, “Inclusive Literature in the Library and the Classroom: The Importance of Young Adult and Children’s Books that Portray Characters with Disabilities”.

“With today’s inclusive classrooms comes some social struggle for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are not befriended as quickly as students without

disabilities (Andrews, 1998) and this circumstance have a lot to do with the lack of exposure, understanding, and acceptance (Smith-D'Arezzo and Moore-Thomas 2010). If children and young adults are exposed to books that portray characters with disabilities, they can learn about their own feelings towards their peers with disabilities, reflect on similarities between themselves and the character with the disability, and become aware of the everyday life of a child with a disability. They can learn to understand the challenges their peers with disabilities face every day (Prater, 2003)" (Wopperer, p. 28).

Every student, regardless of ability or not, should feel like they belong in the classroom and that they can connect with the characters just like their peers.

As students get older, they feel the need to read what they are interested in rather than books that are "boring" to them. Young adult literature is so unique because it opens the doors to different styles of writing and narration styles. Many YAL novels provide hope to the students. Hope that things can change in school, at home, in life. Integrating novels with characters with disabilities will create an atmosphere where students are becoming aware and developing perspective with the world around them, even inside their own classroom. The opportunities are endless when it comes to bringing diversity into the classroom.

There are several benefits to reading young adult literature. Teachers can use YAL as a tool in the classroom for hard topics. Students are going through a significant time in their lives and need something or someone to connect to so they can feel like they are not alone. This tool should be used in English classrooms around the world. "Consciousness, presence, compassion, and healing are elements we want our educators to incorporate and our students to experience. Through loving observations of students; the counter-narratives presented by YAL; and the use of compassionate, humanizing pedagogies with students, classrooms can offer

students mirrors in which they are reminded and awakened to the permanence of their worth. Uplifting students is a unifying desire we continually discover as we talk to teachers all over the world” (Aziz, Wilder, Mora, p. 77). Students like to see themselves in literature. Young adult literature provides a mirror for students, to see themselves through the characters. They believe, if the character can get through their conflict, they can become courageous and do the same.

**Limitations:**

There are not many limitations when it comes to using YAL. One limitation is the lack of resources. Teachers get a certain list they are allowed to teach in their classrooms. Many times, teachers are stuck teaching the classics, which ends up turning off students from reading. Chris Crowe (2001) wrote in *The English Journal*, “Often, however, some teachers and concerned parents (including me) have seen the adverse effects the classics have on unprepared or reluctant readers” (p. 147). Blakemore mentioned in her article that librarians and educators struggle with figuring out how to get books about young readers in the hands of young readers.

Parents and administrators may deem some YAL inappropriate for young readers. The content may be too mature for these readers and may paint a wrong picture of the real world. High school teacher Emily (2013) shares her thoughts on why parents may think YAL is not suitable for their children. Numerous parents believe YA books are not what they practice at home, going against their religion. Kirk found the following,

The usual excuses include things like 'there's magic', 'there's witchcraft', 'there's death', and 'there's evil'. It's all I can do to not scream READ THE BOOKS BECAUSE IT'S SO MUCH MORE! Your kid isn't going to worship the devil



because of a book that has nothing to do with that! Your kid will benefit from the lessons these characters learn in dealing with the horrors of life (i.e. The Holocaust and its similarity to Voldemort's vision for the Wizarding world) in the safe environment of fantasy. But people let their small-mindedness control them and refuse (Kirk, 2013).

She tells the teachers to read the book before suggesting it. “By reading the book, I know what the content is. I know if the student I am suggesting the book is capable of handling not only the actual reading of the novel but the content as well” (Kirk, 2013). There are students who read well above their age group, at their age, or below their age, and that is okay. A solution for this fear of content would be having the parents and administrators read the novels first. Emily recalls her Mom saying she would ask to read the book first or have her read them back again to make sure she was interested in the text. These limitations have solutions, with reading the book prior to teaching it and making sure educators have the correct resources to teach these books.

### **CHAPTER 3 - Resources for Using YAL as a Tool**

If you work with adolescents, you are aware of the many untreated mental health issues on a daily basis. Young adults at this stage of their lives are going through many developmental changes, physically and mentally. They are redefining their personalities and figuring out where they stand in the world. These individuals are often unaware of who to confide in, and oftentimes educators are unaware of how to help. Many educators send the student down to the school counselor's office and have the trained professional help them, especially when the student is “acting out” leaving it up to the counselor to resolve it. This creates an overwhelming situation that can cause unnecessary stress on all parties involved. Instead of the school counselor being the sole outlet, why can't educators, who witness first-hand, be trained to help guide students to a safe space to express themselves first? There is evidence for using Young Adult Literature as a tool to address and bring awareness to mental health, creating the need for English Language Arts teachers to use texts with characters dealing with mental health issues.

The purpose of these resources is to provide insight on what to use in the classroom; not only resources for curriculum, but resources to help young adults with their mental status. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), “many people living with mental illness say the stigma they face is often worse than the illness itself” (Canwetalk, 2016). People tend to create stigmas revolving around mental health due to their lack of understanding as well as the lack of comfort it may bring. The following resources will assist educators alike in figuring out how to help students with mental health issues, and which YAL books will allow the discussions and conversations to flow.

In this chapter, there will be two sections for resources. Section one will be novels, poems, and films including characters dealing with topics such as suicide, bullying, having a disability, sexuality, mourning a loss, and psychological trauma. The second section will consist of resources specific for educators, parents, and students. There are multiple websites and activities to learn more about mental health and what is required to maintain a healthy status. I have created my own Google Site for this section where you will find books, articles, and different methods to bring awareness and address mental health.

### **Section One: YAL**

This section provides a plethora of YAL texts, films, and poems that can bridge together the literature being read and the students' well-being. There will be subsections for different topics like empathy, depression, suicide, sexuality, living with a disability, family structure, psychological trauma, and death. These topics integrate into the lives of young adults and choosing literature and films that include characters dealing with these topics can provide them with insight on how to cope in real life. You will also find definitions of these topics in the subsections. Knowing as much as possible about these topics will help make discussing and implementing skills comfortable and less challenging.

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**Empathy:** feeling with someone, being able to put yourself in their place as if you were them and feeling those feelings. There are different types of empathy, cognitive, emotional, and compassionate.

**Cognitive:** also known as 'perspective-taking'. Cognitive empathy is being able to put yourself in someone else's place and see their perspective. This allows someone to see the perspective

without necessarily engaging with their emotions. This does not really fit with the typical definition of empathy, but this is a much more rational and logical process.

**Emotional:** also known as ‘personal distress’ or ‘emotional contagion’. This is closer to the typical understanding of empathy, but more emotional. This is probably the first type of empathy children feel, understanding other people’s emotions. This helps when responding to friends or others when they are distressed.

**Compassionate:** feeling someone’s pain and taking action to help. Compassion is about feeling concern for someone, but with an additional move towards action to mitigate the problem.

**Books that deal with *empathy*:**

- ***Perks of Being a Wallflower*** by Stephen Chbosky

A coming-of-age story that follows an introverted adolescent through his first year of high school. The story will lead to discussions about walking in someone else’s shoes and feeling empathy for the characters.

**Goodreads:** <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/47440429-the-perks-of-being-a-wallflower>

**SHMOOP:**  
<https://www.shmoop.com/perks-of-being-a-wallflower/>

**The film:**  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Perks\\_of\\_Being\\_a\\_Wallflower\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Perks_of_Being_a_Wallflower_(film))

**Previewing the Movie:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQPhbA1luzw>

**IMBD review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1659337/>

- ***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*** by Rebecca Skloot

Based on a true story, a poor black cancer patient's cells were taken without her knowledge in 1951. These cells became a crucial part of modern medicine, though Henrietta's legacy was unknown until now. Compassion, relatability, patience, and empathy are some of the main themes learned throughout this novel.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6493208-the-immortal-life-of-henrietta-lacks>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/the-immortal-life-of-henrietta-lacks/summary.html>

**The Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Immortal\\_Life\\_of\\_Henrietta\\_Lacks\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Immortal_Life_of_Henrietta_Lacks_(film))

**Previewing the**

**Movie:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-jxEX1XQpY>

**IMDB**

**review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5686132/>

- ***Night*** by Elie Wiesel

*Night* is about a young teen's experience in the Nazi concentration camps at the height of WWII. During the Holocaust, many outsiders display compassion. Reading this novel, young readers will empathize with the main character due to the traumatic events throughout the novel.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/265616-un-di-velt-hot-geshvign>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/night/>

- ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** by Harper Lee

Based in the 1930s, this novel depicts class and racial inequality experienced in the American South. The main characters in this novel show great empathy towards each other, even in the most difficult times. As Atticus often says in the novel, “climb into his skin and walk around” (Harper, 1960), and these qualities bleed through the pages and leave students feeling immersed in the story’s cluster of emotions.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3275794-to-kill-a-mockingbird>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/quotes>

**The****Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To\\_Kill\\_a\\_Mockingbird\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Kill_a_Mockingbird_(film))

**Previewing the****Movie:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR7loA\\_oziY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR7loA_oziY)

**IMDB****Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056592/>

- ***The Distance Between Us*** by Reyna Grande

This story is a memoir that describes the author’s childhood in Mexico and the trials and tribulations of children who are left behind when their parents head north to the United States. The entire novel is in Reyna’s perspective, thoughts, and feelings. This

creates a sense of realism. This story tells a powerful immigrant story and is capable of teaching young adults the valuable lesson of empathy.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13260227-the-distance-between-us>

**LitCharts:**

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-distance-between-us/summary>

**Interview with**

**Reyna:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Rv-hP6hflU>

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**Depression:** major depressive disorder or clinical depression is a common but serious mood disorder. This causes severe symptoms that affect how one feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating or working.

**Major Depression:** one of the most common mental disorders in the U.S. This has the same definition as depression.

**Books dealing with *depression*:**

- *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini

After being accepted into an elite high school, Craig is finding it difficult to compete with his peers resulting in drug use and depression. He finds help and a new purpose in life after he is admitted to the adult unit of a psychiatric hospital. Vizzini's words are an extraordinary honest expression of what it feels like to struggle through depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, uncertainty.

**Goodreads:**

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/248704.It\\_s\\_Kind\\_of\\_a\\_Funny\\_Story](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/248704.It_s_Kind_of_a_Funny_Story)

**The  
Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It%27s\\_Kind\\_of\\_a\\_Funny\\_Story\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It%27s_Kind_of_a_Funny_Story_(film))

**Previewing the Movie:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dSk92CbuFE>

**IMDB Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0000804497/>

- ***Dr. Bird's Advice for Sad Poets*** by Evan Roskos

A sixteen-year-old has to live and deal with his abusive father alone ever since his older sister got kicked out. This young boy struggles with anxiety and depression along with trying to figure out why his sister was kicked out. The young boy shares his experience seeking advice and receiving help for his struggle with depression.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15764032-dr-bird-s-advice-for-sad-poets>

**IMDB****Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5975876/>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/dr-birds-advice-for-sad-poets>

- ***Cut*** by Patricia McCormick

Fifteen-year-old Callie is admitted to a rehabilitation facility due to the fact that she cuts herself. She refuses to speak or participate in therapy until a fellow cutter enters the group. This fellow cutter makes it difficult for Callie to stay silent. This novel enters the world of therapy and healing which can lead to discussions and awareness about what depression can cause.



**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/662597.Cut>

**Teenink:**

[https://www.teenink.com/reviews/book\\_reviews/article/77893/Cut-by-Patricia-McCormick/](https://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/77893/Cut-by-Patricia-McCormick/)

**The Novel:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cut\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cut_(novel))

- *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* by Peter Cameron

Eighteen-year-old James is about to his freshman year of college but is looking for a farmhouse across the country to escape to. He is realizing his sexuality but is afraid of how it makes him look. This coming-of-age novel studies the effect of low-level depression and how it can influence a teenager.

**Goodreads:**

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/235466.Someday\\_This\\_Pain\\_Will\\_Be\\_Useful\\_to\\_You](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/235466.Someday_This_Pain_Will_Be_Useful_to_You)

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-someday-this-pain-will-be-useful-to/#gsc.tab=0>

**The Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Someday\\_This\\_Pain\\_Will\\_Be\\_Useful\\_to\\_You\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Someday_This_Pain_Will_Be_Useful_to_You_(film))

**Previewing the Film:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHihP9EA7a0>

**IMDB Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1703125/>

- *Depression: A Teen's Guide to Survive and Thrive* by Jacqueline Toner

This text is a guidebook for teenagers who are dealing with depression or are at risk for depression. This provides guidance on cognitive behavioral therapy that can lead

teenagers to take a problem-solving, strategy-based approach to deal with depressed moods, thoughts, and behavior. This is intended to help teens without overwhelming them.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/31149352-depression>

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**Suicide:** when people direct violence at themselves with the intent to end their lives, and they die because of their actions.

**Suicide Attempt:** when people harm themselves with the intent to end their lives, but they do not die because of their actions.

**Books dealing with *suicide*:**

- *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

A young teen, Clay Jenson, receives cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker- his classmate and crush- who committed suicide two weeks earlier. Hannah's voice tells her story on the tapes. She shares the thirteen reasons why she killed herself. This novel dives into the struggles of suicide and what can be done to prevent it.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29844228-thirteen-reasons-why>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/thirteen-reasons-why/>

**Netflix**

**Series:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13\\_Reasons\\_Why](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13_Reasons_Why)

**Previewing the  
Series:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KVZFw-Vjfw>

**IMDB**

**Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1837492/>

- ***The Weight of Zero*** by Karen Fortunati

This novel is about a young teen suffering from bipolar disease and wants to commit suicide. She has a meaningful relationship with her gifted psychiatrist who changes her perspective and makes her believe her diagnosis is not a death sentence. This story lets young teens know there is always someone out there to listen and guide, it is not over, nor do they suffer alone.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25226021-the-weight-of-zero>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/the-weight-of-zero>

- ***My Heart and Other Black Holes*** by Jasmine Warga

This novel is about a sixteen-year-old girl who is obsessed with plotting her death, she realizes she does not have the courage to do it alone. She is constantly fighting the battle of gossip and her distant mother on top of thinking of her own death. She eventually finds a ‘suicide partner’ who is struggling with their own issues. They both make a pact to commit suicide, but the choice between loving to live and ending it all makes the young girl rethink her plans. She must now convince her friend of the same. This book tackles the tough topic of suicide but creates awareness and is life-affirming.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18336965-my-heart-and-other-black-holes>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/my-heart-and-other-black-holes>

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**Sexuality:** includes sexual orientation, such as who a person is attracted to and whether the person identifies as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

**Sexual Identity:** refers to whether a person feels they are male or female.

**Books dealing with *sexuality/sexual identity*:**

- *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan

In this novel, David Levithan creates a perfect world where sexuality is not important, and everyone can live their lives how they want. The utopia in this novel has a school where the class president is openly gay, the star football jock is a cross-dresser, and the main character Paul's homosexuality is not an issue. This space is without discrimination and is a must-read for teens whether they are gay or straight.

**Goodreads:**

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23228.Boy\\_Meets\\_Boy](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23228.Boy_Meets_Boy)

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/boy-meets-boy/>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/boy-meets-boy>

- *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg

Rafe is a soccer player, a writer, a skier, and proud to be gay. He faces some troubles when he transfers to an all-boys' boarding school where he decides to hide his sexuality to see what life would be like as a regular guy. This story is about fitting in and figuring out how to be true to yourself.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16100972-openly-straight>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/series/openly-straight>

- ***October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard*** by Lesléa Newman

This novel is a poetic exploration of the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998. This is based on a true story, which may make the conversation harder to have. Openly gay Matthew Shepard was beaten and tied to a fence to die. Writing this novel in verse makes the feelings come alive and Newman adds different perspectives which many would not have thought of. This novel is intended to raise awareness of the real-life struggles sexuality and sexual identity can bring.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13530012-october-mourning>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/october-mourning-a-song-for-matthew-shepard>

**Literacy Daily:**

[https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-daily/2012/10/05/5-questions-with-lesl%C3%A9a-newman-\(october-mourning\)](https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-daily/2012/10/05/5-questions-with-lesl%C3%A9a-newman-(october-mourning))

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**Specific Learning Disability (SLD):** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

defines SLD as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. SLD does not include learning problems due to visual, hearing, or motor disabilities. Also not included are the disabilities due to emotional disturbance or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

**Books dealing with *disability*:**

- ***Pinned*** by Sharon Flake

Adonis is a young girl who is intellectually gifted and born without legs. A love story begins to blossom between Autumn who is a strong wrestler but can barely read in ninth grade and Adonis. They two fight to be together despite what their peers think. This novel shares two young teens going through their own disabilities yet finding someone to get through them with.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/13492511-pinned>

**Scholastic:**

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/pinned-by-sharon-flake/>

**Interview:**

<https://angelhornpages.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/sharon-g-flake-talks-about-pinned-and-giveaway/>

- ***Okay for Now*** by Gary D. Schmidt

New to school, eighth-grader Doug moves with his family and has to adjust to a new town, new peers and new to everything. Many people, including teachers, don't

expect much from Doug, he is just a skinny kid with learning disabilities. Despite those opinions and trouble at home, Doug remains optimistic. He learns to make some unexpected friends, and everything is okay, for now. This novel is intended to guide young readers to let them know it'll be okay. Life may not be perfect, but it is what you make it, even if you have a learning disability. You are not alone.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9165406-okay-for-now>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-okay-for-now/#gsc.tab=0>

**Interview with Author:**

<https://www.npr.org/2013/02/28/172877128/with-audubons-help-beat-up-kid-is-okay-for-now>

- ***Wonder*** by R.J. Palacio

A young boy who was born with facial differences has to move to a mainstream school. He becomes a hero when he enters fifth grade, taking the people around him on his life journey. This book teaches compassion and acceptance and proves that people with disabilities were born to stand out.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/11387515-wonder>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/wonder/>

**The Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_(film))

**Previewing the Film:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob7fPOzbmzE>

**IMDB Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2543472/>

- ***Mockingbird*** by Kathryn Erskine

This novel is about a young girl with Asperger's syndrome coping with her brother's death due to a school shooting. She is finding it difficult to cope with the death and to deal with her emotions because of her condition. Her peers think she is weird and odd, but she is just trying to live her life every day. She seeks help and guidance from a school counselor which works. This story is supposed to help young readers understand the complexities that are sometimes attached with disabilities.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6596547-mockingbird>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-mockingbird/#gsc.tab=0>

**Author**

**Website:**

<http://kathrynerskine.com/book/title/mockingbird>

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**Family Structure:** the members of a household who are linked by marriage or bloodline and is typically in reference to at least one child residing in the home under the age of eighteen.

**Divorce:** the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body. When one is a child of divorce, that experience will usually intensify adolescent growth and adjustment at the time and may create some concerns in later relationships.

**Books that deal with *family structure/divorce*:**

- ***The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones*** by Wendelin Van Draanen



The family life for sixth-grader Lincoln Jones has just fallen apart and his coping strategy is his imagination. He writes his own stories to deal with the real world around him. This novel is funny and intended to help young readers deal with going through a broken family.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/28814927-the-secret-life-of-lincoln-jones>

**Kidsread:**

<https://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/the-secret-life-of-lincoln-jones>

**Author**

**Interview:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bApKDCqv01U>

- *The Divorce Express* by Paula Danziger

Phoebe's parents are divorced and she lives in the country with her dad, she does not like this lifestyle. When she is finally getting used to her new life and making new friends, she finds out her mother is getting remarried, resulting in more life changes. Young teens reading this story will understand the different ways to cope with this kind of family structure and to deal with whatever life throws at them.

**Goodreads:**

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/946542.The\\_Divorce\\_Express](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/946542.The_Divorce_Express)

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/shortguide-divorce-express/#gsc.tab=0>

**Scholastic:**

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/the-divorce-express-by-paula-danziger/>

- *Mend: A Story of Divorce* by Sophia Recca and Anthony E. Zuiker

Nine-year-old Sophia was enjoying her life with her mom, dad, and little brother when she was blindsided by her parents' divorce. Her dad was moving to another state while she was staying with her mom and brother. This story will resonate with many teens who have gone through divorce with their parents or who are experiencing it at that moment. This story will share some insight on how to cope and who to talk to about this life change.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40539795-mend>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/mend-a-story-of-divorce>

**Author****Information:**

<https://zuikerpress.com/our-books/mend/>

- *You're Never Alone... A Child of Divorce Searches for Happiness* by Philip Nork

This novel follows the life journey of a young boy whose parents get divorced and how he desperately tries to be accepted for who he is and all he wants is to be happy again. Throughout this novel, this young boy learns many life lessons that all men need to know. Reading this book will help young people of divorce to cope with this situation and still learn from it.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13134451-you-re-never-alone-a-child-of-divorce-searches-for-happiness>

**Author****Website:**

<http://philipnork.com/Books.html>

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**Psychological Trauma:** damage to the mind that occurs as a result of a distressing event. This is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope, or integrate the emotions involved with that experience.

- **Traumatic** experiences are common in childhood and **adolescence** and can have significant **psychological effects** on the child's **emotional** well-being and overall development. Outcomes can be affected positively or negatively depending on responses and interventions.

**Books dealing with *psychological trauma*:**

- *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka

Ever since Jarrett was in kindergarten, his family has been a mess. His mom is addicted to drugs and his dad is nowhere to be found. Jarrett lives with his grandparents and trying to live close to normal life as possible. He begins to piece together his own life when he is in his teenage years and figuring out how to survive through art. This memoir helps young people deal with traumatic events that shape our lives.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37822650-hey-kiddo>

**Scholastic:**

<https://kids.scholastic.com/kids/book/hey-kiddo-by-jarrett-j-krosoczka/>

**Author Interview:**

<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/16/657772230/hey-kiddo-aims-to-help-kids-with-addicted-parents-feel-less-alone>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-hey-kiddo/#gsc.tab=0>

- ***Speak*** by Laurie Halse Anderson

A freshman in high school is being ostracized by her peers because she will not say why she called the cops at the end of summer party. This girl was raped. She is scared to say something because the guy who raped her goes to the same high school and is a threat to her. Through this novel, young people will learn to speak up and defend themselves regardless of what people think.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39280444-speak>

**SHMOOP:**

<https://www.shmoop.com/speak-anderson/>

**The**

**Film:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speak\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speak_(film))

**Previewing the**

**Film:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySpPkHZ66aI>

**IMDB**

**Review:**

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0378793/>

- ***The Fall of Innocence*** by Jenny Torres Sanchez

When Emilia was eight years old, she suffered from a traumatic attack in the woods behind her school. Now she is sixteen and trying to live her life without thinking about this experience. When some new information comes out about her attacker, she goes right back to that state of mind, scared, dying, screaming with no noise. This novel displays the effects of traumatic experiences and ways to cope and how to continue to live life.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/30309371-the-fall-of-innocence>

**Scholastic:**

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/the-fall-of-innocence-by-jenny-torres-sanchez/>

**Author Interview:**

<https://www.hypable.com/the-fall-of-innocence-sneak-peek-and-author-interview/>

- ***These Gentle Wounds*** by Helene Dunbar

It has been five years since a tragedy rocked Gordie's world forever. He believes no one can understand what it feels like to be broken from the inside. When life starts to make sense to Gordie, his father decides to come back to his life insisting on a spot in his life. This story covers the trauma and the feelings behind dealing with certain situations. Young people will find a way to cope and this book brings awareness of it is okay to not be okay.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18187029-these-gentle-wounds>

**Book Review:**

<http://thehidingspot.blogspot.com/2014/05/review-these-gentle-wounds-by-helene.html>

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**Death:** may refer to the end of life as either an event or condition.

“In a lot of YA fiction, the tone is different: with death woven as realistically into the lives of characters as it would be into our own, making the stories grittier and darker. This allows young adults to engage with the reality of death through the safe act of reading” (Wallis, 2014).

**Grief:** deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death.

**Books dealing with *death/grief*:**

- *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds

This free-verse novel takes place over one minute. Sixty seconds. Within this minute, Will is on a mission, revenge for his brother's murder. Will carries his anger to mask up his grieving the loss of his brother. He begins his journey on the elevator, going down, and encounters ghosts from his brother's past, encouraging him to think about his decisions and the consequences that may happen. Young people reading this novel will discover the troubled atmosphere that accompanies grief and death of a loved one.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22552026-long-way-down>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-long-way-down/#gsc.tab=0>

**Author Interviews:**

<https://www.npr.org/2017/10/30/560286304/in-long-way-down-the-ghosts-of-gun-violence-chill-a-plan-for-revenge>

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/avk8pe/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah-jason-reynolds---serving-young-readers-with--long-way-down->

- *My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece* by Annabel Pitcher

After the death of his sister due to a suicide bombing in London, Jaime's life was never the same. Everyone in Jaime's family is coping in different ways, some detrimental to their beliefs. The dad is now Islamophobic, the surviving twin feels guilty for being alive, and Jamie is trying to deal with this death his own way. Young readers

will learn that people cope in different ways and that there is no right way to grieve.

Grieving is a process with no time limit.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9429895-my-sister-lives-on-the-mantelpiece>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-my-sister-lives-on-the-mantelpiece/#gsc.tab=0>

**Author Interview:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMvRL7j8an0>

- ***The Boy in the Black Suit*** by Jason Reynolds

Ever since his mom died, the only thing Matt has going for him in his life is his well-paying job at the funeral home. This job comes with seeing a lot of people dealing with grief, which he can understand. Matt then meets Lovey, who has been through a substantial amount of trauma. With this job and his relationship with Lovey, Matt discovers how to process his own grief and learns how to navigate life when a major loss changes everything. This story highlights the grieving process and that it is different for everyone. Pain runs in everyone, regardless of amount. Young people will learn how to cope and how to confront their grieving emotions.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/21490991-the-boy-in-the-black-suit>

**Bookrags:**

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-the-boy-in-the-black-suit/#gsc.tab=0>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/the-boy-in-the-black-suit>

**Author Interview:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa\\_NfjPAkg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa_NfjPAkg)

- ***DJ Rising*** by Love Maia

Sixteen-year-old Marley has found his calling, music. It makes him feel connected to his late father and it helps him escape the reality of his drug-addicted mother. Marley ends up getting a huge professional job while he is coping with the devastating loss in his personal life. Young readers can learn different avenues to help with the grieving process. Music is a great tool to help cope and deal with the loss of a loved one and can bring hope to a brighter future.

**Goodreads:**

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/11041840-dj-rising>

**Teenreads:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/reviews/dj-rising>

**Author Interview:**

<https://www.teenreads.com/blog/2012/02/06/love-maia-talks-to-herself>

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The books and links in this section are made to help educators get an in-depth look at the different topics regarding mental health. These topics can be hard to discuss, but having discussions are important and could save lives. Reading literature that includes characters facing similar struggles as the students in the classroom will make for a groundbreaking connection and awareness.

## **Section Two: Mental Health**

The resources in this section are geared towards where to ask for help and multiple websites that can assist when guiding your students or your young teens at home. Educators, parents, and students often struggle when finding resources to maintain a healthy mental status



on their own, so this section will be the beginning foundation to build that strong mental condition. This section will include websites, lesson/unit plans, and contact information for more guidance and assistance.

**Educators:**

Educators should know the warning signs, whom to turn to, and how to access support and mental health services. Some behaviors to look for in students are feeling sad or withdrawn, making plans to harm themselves or others, severe out-of-control behaviors, not eating, avoiding schoolwork or basic tasks, or changes in their mood or personality. Some people educators can reach out to are school counselors, other staff members, and parents or guardians. On this website, you will also find suggestions for mental health programs schoolwide. Being around for your students is the key component when they are going through a mental health crisis. When students know they have someone they can talk to, that will build trust and open the doors for discussion. When using literature that includes characters struggling with their mental health status, educators will know how to approach those tough topics. These websites provided inform educators what should be done in the time of crisis:

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators>

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/care/educators/>

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/external/2017/09/teachers-mental-health/>

<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/teacher-created-mental-health-check-chart-students-now-62169283>

<http://canwetalk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/COOR-79l-2016-03-CWT-lesson-plans.pdf>

[https://walkinourshoes.org/content/Classroom Lesson Plans.pdf](https://walkinourshoes.org/content/Classroom_Lesson_Plans.pdf)

<https://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/mental-illness>

<https://bookriot.com/2018/10/02/ya-books-about-mental-illness/>

[http://www.health.wa.gov.au/docreg/Education/Population/Health Problems/Mental Illness/Mentalhealth stigma fact.pdf](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/docreg/Education/Population/Health_Problems/Mental_Illness/Mentalhealth_stigma_fact.pdf)

### **Parents:**

Parents and caregivers should know what to look for in their children when it comes to mental health. How can they recognize if something is wrong? Are they being withdrawn or suddenly angry? Are they responding with an ‘I’m fine’ all the time? If they are acting out of the ordinary, what should parents do? Keeping in contact with the child’s teachers and school counselor is a helpful way to keep the mental health status up to par. Often times, at this age, young people are not capable of dealing with difficult situations on their own, like the death of a loved one or separation of their parents. Being there to help guide and seeking outside help can create a safer space to discuss the feelings accompanying those situations. I have provided some websites and literature for parents specifically seeking guidance, wondering what they should look for in their children, and how to talk about mental health:

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/parents-caregivers>

<https://namimainlinepa.org/mental-health-books-for-children-and-teens-and-their-parents/>

<https://www.adolescenthealth.org/Resources/Clinical-Care-Resources/Mental-Health/Mental-Health-Resources-For-Parents-of-Adolescents.aspx>

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/care/parents/>

### **Students:**

As a young adult, there are times when the status of their mental health is not always the best. Some days are lower than others and some days are higher, but how do they deal with those inconsistencies? Is there someone they can turn to, or do they have to face their struggles alone? Can they get in trouble for speaking up and asking for help? Are there different coping skills I can learn and use, if so where can I find those? All these questions flow through the brains of young adults. They are worried about how they will look if they ask for help. They need to know it is okay to ask for help and it is mandatory in order to feel better. Young people need a safe place to go with safe people to talk to, so where do they go? Provided are some websites specifically for students. The sites include who to talk to, where to find help, and how to cope with their struggles:

<https://namimainlinepa.org/mental-health-books-for-children-and-teens-and-their-parents/>

<https://www.adolescenthealth.org/Resources/Clinical-Care-Resources/Mental-Health/Mental-Health-Resources-For-Adolesc.aspx>

<https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/mental-health/how-adults-can-support-adolescent-mental-health/resources/index.html>

<https://www.nami.org/find-support/teens-and-young-adults>

I have created my own resource website. The website is called *[Literature Healing](#)* and it includes everything from books and articles, to specific links dedicated to educators, parents, and students. The intention of all these resources is to guide everyone towards getting help or helping others.

## **Chapter Four: Conclusion and Recommendations**

One of the most important goals as an English teacher is to inspire students to love literature and to make connections with the world inside the pages. During the years of transitioning from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school, many students experience various issues that have an effect on their overall well-being, particularly their education. K.J. Richmond, an English professor at Northern Michigan University, concluded from her research that “... one of the issues that should be at the forefront of English Education is how literature can help young adults better understand- and confront the stigma- of mental illness...” (Richmond, p.19). Therefore, it is vital to find ways to help English teachers to expand and complement the traditional literary standard and to identify culturally relevant literature.

The complexities that YAL brings to the English classroom create ample opportunities to have key discussions. It is during these discussions that students are able to learn how to address similar issues such as the characters and connect this to their own struggles. For example, during the middle grades at school, students may encounter bullying and they may not know how to handle this situation. By using literature about characters with mental health struggles, educators are able to address the call for culturally relevant literature. Research by Ladson-Billings (1992) shows that culturally relevant teaching is to “use student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge” (p. 4).

The benefits of YAL in the classroom trumps the limitations it can bring. One of the main limitations is having these texts available in schools. Despite the inclusion of some YA

literature, the majority of texts most frequently included in high school English classes are still canonical pieces, not young adult literature (Applebee, 1992, p.28). These include, but not limited to, Shakespearean plays (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet*), *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Of Mice and Men*. While some of these texts include characters who have mental illness (e.g., suicidal ideation in *Romeo and Juliet*, depression and suicide in *Hamlet*), most are not the focus of the pieces nor easily accessible to teen readers (Richmond, p. 20). Therefore, it's important to incorporate, or even scaffold, books such as *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Long Way Down*, and *Cut* that can help educators to break down those stereotypes of mental health as well as provide awareness and support for students.

Some suggestions and recommendations to incorporate YAL can be found in the resource guide, Chapter Three. This section is intended to help educators, parents, and students find the right way to approach a healthy mental status. Many people have a hard time helping others because they are not sure how to go about it in a productive way. Provided are specific books that can be used as the YAL tool and different links attached describing the book or the film adaptation. Also to be found in this section are websites specifically for educators, parents, and students. My own website, [Literature Healing](#), condenses all three groups into one place and supplies readers with YAL options and outlets for help. These suggestions are intended for readers seeking more information on what to use in the classroom and how to start talking about mental health. Achieving a healthy mental state requires help from others and students need to know they are not alone when struggling with mental health.

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